

THE

HISTORIAN

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Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

March 2013

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 21, 2013, at noon at the Kate Lobraño House. Guest speaker for the program will be Rene McClendon, State Co-Coordinator of the National History Day Program in Mississippi, and the Hancock County students who participated in this year's program. *Reservations are required* and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call *by noon on Wednesday, March 20, 2013*, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

Student presenters will be sixth graders Taylor Blocker and Abigail Garman sharing their exhibit, "CSS H. L. Hunley: The Other Shot Heard 'Round the World'" and Isabelle Powell presenting her historical paper project entitled "Quin-Casualties: A Turning Point in Military Family Policies." These students attend Hancock Middle School and are instructed by Paula Lacoste, Hancock Middle School IMPACT Program teacher. Hancock High School senior Laura King will be unable to attend to present her exhibit, "Slayings in Neshoba County: Turning Point in Civil Rights Prosecutions." She will represent Mississippi at the History Day National Contest in June.



The entrance to the newest city on the Mississippi Gulf Coast—
DIAMONDHEAD

The Formation of the City of Diamondhead

By Louis Fuchs
President of the Hancock
County Historical Society

The community of Diamondhead became the City of Diamondhead in 2012. There was a great deal of fanfare when the Secretary of State presented the newly issued city charter to the mayor and city council. As the city council started taking its first halting steps at creating the city, you couldn't help thinking about how this all came about. As someone who was

not familiar with the history of the area, I began to think of more than just the ABC's of Diamondhead's becoming a city. I began to think of Diamondhead's becoming a city as the latest chapter in the story of how people come to the realization that organizing themselves into communities enables them to become secure and prosperous.

It was fascinating to learn that people began settling in what would become Hancock County and the City of Diamondhead six thousand years ago. What must they have encountered when they wandered into the area? It's hard to imagine no Biloxi, no Gulfport, no Bay St. Louis, no shopping centers,

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Eddie Coleman, Editor
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MISSION STATEMENT

"TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION."

no roadways or bridges, nothing but wilderness, marshes, and water. The mild climate and readily available sources of food must have made this an ideal place to settle. We currently settle on the Mississippi Gulf Coast for the same basic reasons, but now we have many more things to interest us.

As the years passed and their populations increased, the natives organized themselves into groups, first for survival and then for cultural, economic, and social reasons. By the time the Europeans arrived, there were ten tribes living between the Mississippi River and Mobile Bay.

The French began the exploration of the Great Lakes area and the Mississippi River in the late seventeenth century. In 1699 France sent a naval expedition sailing into the Gulf of Mexico under the command of Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville to discover the mouth of the Mississippi River and establish a fortified colony to control the Mississippi River Valley. D'Iberville and his crew finally landed on Cat Island and began their exploration of the coastal area, Lake Pontchartrain, and the Mississippi River. They established a colonial base in Biloxi, but it was continually plagued by a lack of deep-water access. In 1722 the French relocated their headquarters to New Orleans.

After moving their headquarters to New Orleans, the French lost interest in the Mississippi Gulf Coast area. It was left to the few original French colonists who had settled the area and the Indians who had lived here for generations. There was little cultural, social, religious, or political development for the remainder of the eighteenth century. The few people remaining were reduced to a subsistence level of survival.

In 1763 the French and Indian War came to an end and France gave its North American territories east of the Mississippi River to Great Britain. The English divided their newly acquired territory into East and West Florida. West Florida extended from the Mississippi River to the Perdido River with the future Hancock County and Diamondhead being included in British West Florida. In 1781 Great Britain gave both Floridas to Spain, and Diamondhead became part of Spanish Feliciana County.

The Mississippi Gulf Coast area remained a Spanish colony until the residents rebelled in 1810 and created the Republic of West Florida. The newly formed United States of America annexed the Republic of West Florida ninety days after its creation and ended the conflict. Hancock County was established on December 14, 1812, and was annexed into the Mississippi Territory, along with the remaining portion of Spanish West Florida. On December 10, 1817, it became part of the State of Mississippi.

Once the Mississippi Territory was opened to settlers, thousands of families from the eastern seaboard began moving into the coastal areas. The migration stopped at the eastern shore of the Bay of St. Louis because the journey around the Bay was long, and as a result the western shore became isolated until a train bridge was built across the Bay in 1870.

With the coming of the railroads, the transportation patterns changed, and we no longer had to depend on waterways. Railroads enabled shipping to all parts of the country and brought in visitors from all over. Hotels sprang up all over the coast and tourism boomed.

The Federal Highway Act of 1956 created the interstate high-



This 1973 picture shows the country club, pool, tennis court, parking lot and the former Fairway Villas Motel, located in the lower portion of the picture.

way system, and construction began on I-10 through the Mississippi Gulf Coast making Hancock County accessible to people from a wide area. The federal government began building the Stennis Space Center in the 1960's bringing in thousands of government workers and contractors needing land and housing.

It was in this environment that the Diamondhead Corporation, a large corporation with resort developments in several states, began development operations in coastal Mississippi. It purchased six thousand acres of property adjacent to I-10 and was scheduled to close on the purchase in August of 1969. Hurricane Camille struck the Gulf Coast the day before the closing and threatened to end the project before it began. One of the principal investors was able to fly over Diamondhead after the storm. Seeing such little damage from so destructive a storm, he decided to go ahead with the development. Soon afterwards, planners started laying out

streets and lots, and construction crews started building the infrastructure, model homes, country club, airport, driving range, eighteen sales pavilion, which would later become the community center.

Interstate 10 was completed from the Pearl River to Highway 603/43 in March of 1967, but only the westbound lanes were opened through to Diamondhead by 1970. People interested in Diamondhead were allowed to use the completed westbound lanes to get access to Diamondhead until I-10 was completed to the Diamondhead exit in October of 1970. The first land sales were recorded in 1970. Some of the lots that were sold were accessible only by dirt roads. Thirty-seven hundred lots were sold by June of 1973. Thirty-one homes had been constructed, and another twenty-nine were under construction.

Diamondhead was organized as a Property Owner's Association, a POA. The developer

dominated the POA during the period when the major real estate development was taking place. He and the POA oversaw the construction of the golf course, the country club, the airport, the marina and all of the amenities that they depended on to attract people and make the development successful. They published the *Diamondhead News* to keep homeowners updated on the activities of the various clubs throughout the community and to advertise the availability of new developments like the Oaks, the Highpoint Townhomes, and the Harbor Houses at the Diamondhead Marina. The developer used the POA and the *Diamondhead News* to maintain the homeowners' sense of identity as a community, as Diamondhead.

The Purcell Company, formerly the Diamondhead Corporation, turned over the Property Owners' Association to the homeowner elected Board of Directors on January 1, 1985. This meant that the General Manager, a small staff, and a small group of volunteers would now be responsible for managing the collection of monthly homeowner fees and the administration of the various amenities. The POA struggled with imperfect records and management problems initially but eventually matured into an organization that could successfully guide the community.

Diamondhead continued to grow after the turnover. What began as a resort community and evolved into a retirement community was, also, becoming a destination community for people looking for a nice place to live. As the population of Diamondhead became more diverse, tensions developed between the different groups. Some did not like the POA's increasing monthly dues and spending large sums on golf course maintenance, and others thought that Diamond-

head had grown large enough to now consider becoming a city. There was a failed attempt to oust the POA board in 1993, and in 1994 the incorporation advocates attempted to conduct a petition drive to become a city. Proponents argued that a city would be eligible for a portion of sales and gasoline taxes as well as any taxes from having a casino locate in Diamondhead. Opponents argued that incorporation would only bring in another layer of government along with an increase in taxes. The 1994 incorporation effort stalled but laid the groundwork for the future.

Diamondhead continued its growth into the twenty-first century. Hurricane Katrina struck Hancock County in 2005 and caused extensive damage in Diamondhead. Lives and property were transformed overnight in every part of the county. The old rules no longer applied. Most people now found themselves struggling to overcome the personal and financial devastation that Katrina had brought with her. The POA found itself coping with issues it had never anticipated. Dealing with these issues brought back the old arguments for becoming a city, namely, that a city would be eligible for federal and state financial resources that the POA would not have access to as a private organization. Those arguments added new energy to the incorporation efforts.

As the POA Board struggled with Hurricane Katrina restoration problems, articles began appearing in the *Diamondhead News* comparing a hypothetical City of Diamondhead to the real cities of Waveland and Bay St. Louis. Rumors also began circulating about the possible annexation of Diamondhead by the City of Bay St. Louis. Concerns about the expiration of the various covenants that govern the different areas within the POA also began creating a great deal of anxiety among homeowners.

The POA began taking a



leading role in comparing incorporation, annexation, and simply remaining a Property Owner's Association. By June 2006 POA representatives had engaged in discussions with attorneys, city planners, city officials, and others with knowledge of incorporation and annexation issues. They compared other cities' budgets to the POA budget and to a hypothetical City of Diamondhead budget. They noted that as a city Diamondhead would receive revenue that a POA was not eligible for, but they also pointed out that as a city its expenses may exceed those revenues. In August of 2006 the POA appointed a committee to study annexation, incorporation with a casino, and incorporation without a casino. That committee ultimately made the recommendation that Diamondhead begin the effort to become an incorporated city.

Armed with the POA's recommendation, a committee of Diamondhead residents began the task of incorporating Diamondhead. They recruited volunteers, they held meetings to answer any questions

In the early 1970's the present-day Diamondhead Community Center began "life" as the sales pavilion for the Diamondhead Corporation. This is the way it looked at that time.

that Diamondhead residents may have, and they began the process of acquiring the signatures of at least two-thirds of the registered voters of Diamondhead that would be needed to accompany the petition to the State of Mississippi to incorporate the area. A group of residents who opposed incorporation mounted a legal challenge to the process. The issues were aired in the courts and in the neighborhoods of Diamondhead by residents for or against them. Finally, Diamondhead was incorporated, and the Secretary of State presented the Charter to the new City of Diamondhead Administration on February 6, 2012.

The new City of Diamondhead recently celebrated its one-year anniversary. That year has been busy and eventful. The city council worked hard on an initial financing plan, developed and passed a comprehensive plan, passed a zoning ordinance, created a budget, hired city employees, created a police force, began collecting taxes, and purchased a new city hall. Some of the issues were controversial.

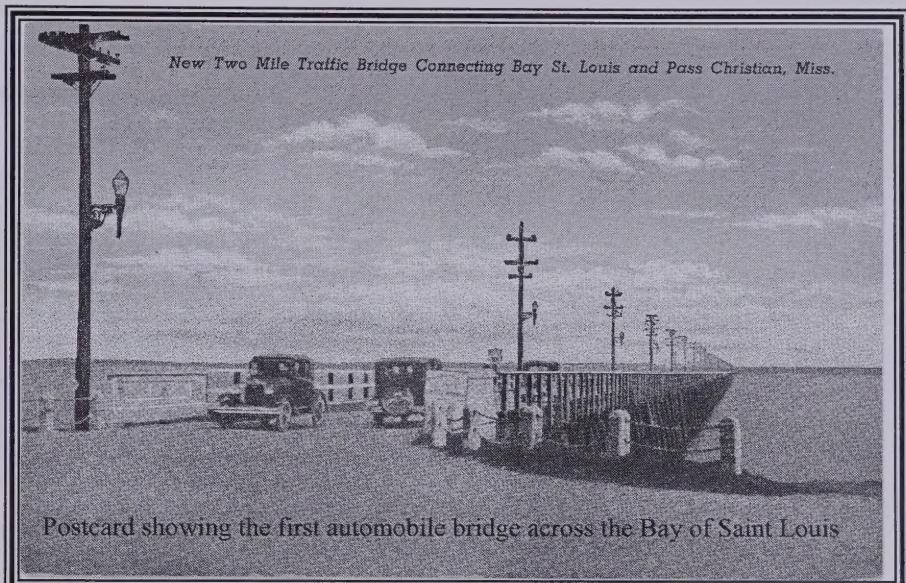
As we prepare for our first municipal elections, we think about the road that has brought us to where we are today, and we realize that where we are now is only a stop on a road that continues into the future. What that future holds for us will depend on what we do; it will depend on the willingness of the citizens of Diamondhead to participate actively in their government.

Did You Know This about Hancock County?

By
Scott Bagley

Did you know that the first bridge across Hancock County's Bay of St. Louis was not built until 1926? While Robert L. Genin had procured a franchise for a privately built bridge across the Bay of St. Louis as early as 1912, it took the efforts of Horatio S. Weston, president of the Hancock County Board of Supervisors, and his associates finally to bring the idea of a publicly funded bridge to fruition. This group successfully made the case that the existing ferry was not only inadequate for ever-increasing traffic, but it was also slow and sometimes dangerous.

In a combined financing effort, the counties of Hancock and Harrison, along with the Mississippi State Highway Department, initiated construction in May of 1926. Under the arrangement fifty percent of the cost was to be federally funded, made available through the highway department, with the balance borne jointly by the two participating counties of Hancock and Harrison. The selected contractor, J. B. Smith of

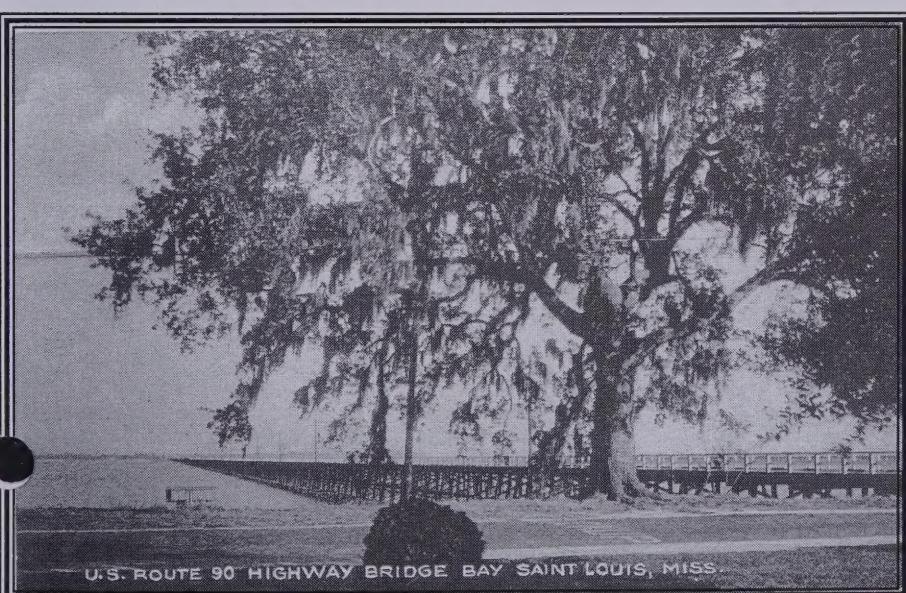


New Orleans, was to be replaced at the end of the year with Youman and Moore of Houston, Texas, which completed the project. The completed bridge, built at a cost of \$752,610.65, was approximately 1.9 miles long and incorporated 491 creosoted timber spans, each 21 feet in length, and a 202 foot electrically operated drawbridge. The roadway was 20 feet wide with a 4-foot sidewalk on the north side of the bridge. The total construction time was approximately eighteen months.

Entering the City of Bay Saint Louis at Ulman Avenue, the

new bridge was officially dedicated on March 2, 1928, with Mayor Charles B. Traub declaring a city half-holiday and requesting that all businesses close during the dedication celebration. In addition to local residents and officials, Governor Theodore G. Bilbo and seventy-five state legislators also attended the dedication. The state delegation had a luncheon at the new Pine Hills Hotel, located between the old Kiln Road and the north side of the Bay, while a parallel luncheon was held for local dignitaries at the new Weston Hotel (the future Reed Hotel) in Bay St. Louis. The dedication ceremony itself was held on the grounds of the Weston Hotel where a grandstand had been constructed. Reports estimate that more than ten thousand people attended.

The Mississippi Highway Commission was the custodian of the new toll-free bridge which, unfortunately, was to require constant maintenance at an average cost of about ten thousand dollars a year in its early years. By 1941, bridge traffic averaged 2,645 cars and trucks per twenty-four hour period and was to increase substantially each year thereafter. Constant repairs to the wooden bridge delayed the flow of traffic. Additionally, frequent fires



over the years required motorists to detour more than thirty miles around the Bay. The city's isolation resulting from damage by the 1947 hurricane finally led local civic leaders to realize that a more stable and reliable structure was needed.

On August 1, 1953, a new bridge across the Bay of St. Louis was opened to traffic, and the original wooden bridge was soon to pass into history.

SOURCES:

"Bi-County Bridge." *The Sea Coast Echo*. (Bay St. Louis) 2 March 1928, Commemorative Issue.

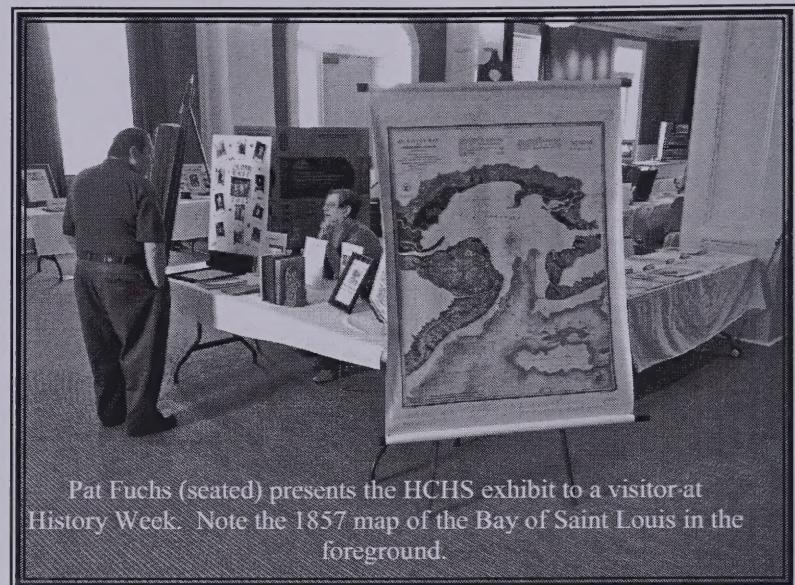
Scharff, Robert G. *Louisiana's Loss, Mississippi's Gain*. Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick Publishing Corp., 1999.

History Week in Biloxi

By
Eddie Coleman

The Mississippi Coast Historical and Genealogical Society and the City of Biloxi hosted the 24th Annual Mississippi Coast History week February 17-20 at the Biloxi Visitors Center, located at 1050 Beach Blvd. across from the Biloxi Lighthouse. For the past several years the Hancock County Historical Society has participated in the event.

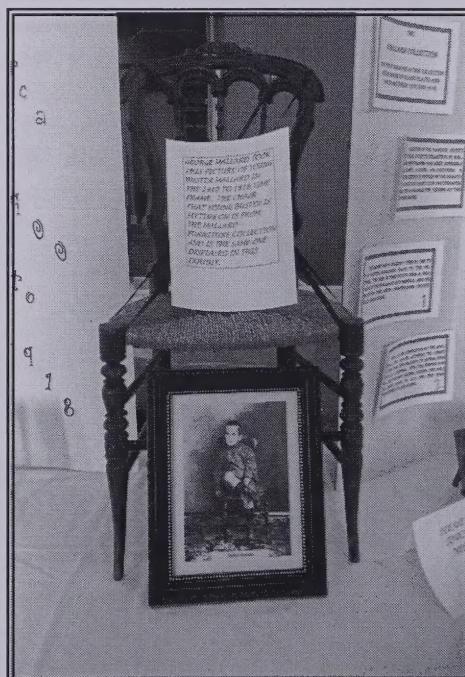
In a recent letter to the HCHS, Julie Suarez, president of the Mississippi Coast Historical and Genealogical Society reported that over eight hundred children participated in the History Art Contest. In addition several school field trips to the exhibits brought hundreds of other students. She also reported that over two thousand visitors from the United States and as far away as Scotland attended.



Organizations who presented exhibits during the week were the Biloxi Fire Museum, the Local History and Genealogy Department of the Biloxi Library, the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum, Beauvoir, the Biloxi Schools, and the De-

partment of Marine Resources. Historical societies participating were the Hancock County Historical Society, the Oceans Springs Genealogical Society, the Long Beach Historical Society, and the Historical Society of Gulfport. Further, the following ethnic groups participated: the Fleur de Lis Ladies Auxiliary, the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church (Greek and Russian), the Jewish Community, the Slavonian Ladies Auxiliary, and the Hibernia Marching Society.

President of the HCHS, Louis Fuchs, and Pat Fuchs volunteered to truck the articles in the HCHS exhibit to Biloxi on Saturday and set up individual sections for the opening of the event on Sunday afternoon. The HCHS exhibit consisted of brochures on the exploration of the Mississippi Gulf Coast and formation of Hancock County, an exhibit from and information on the Monte Walden Collection of Native American Artifacts, an 1857 map of the Bay of Saint Louis and Shieldsboro, and a display of representative photographs of photographer George Mallard as well as a child's chair made by George's father, Prudent Mallard, noted New

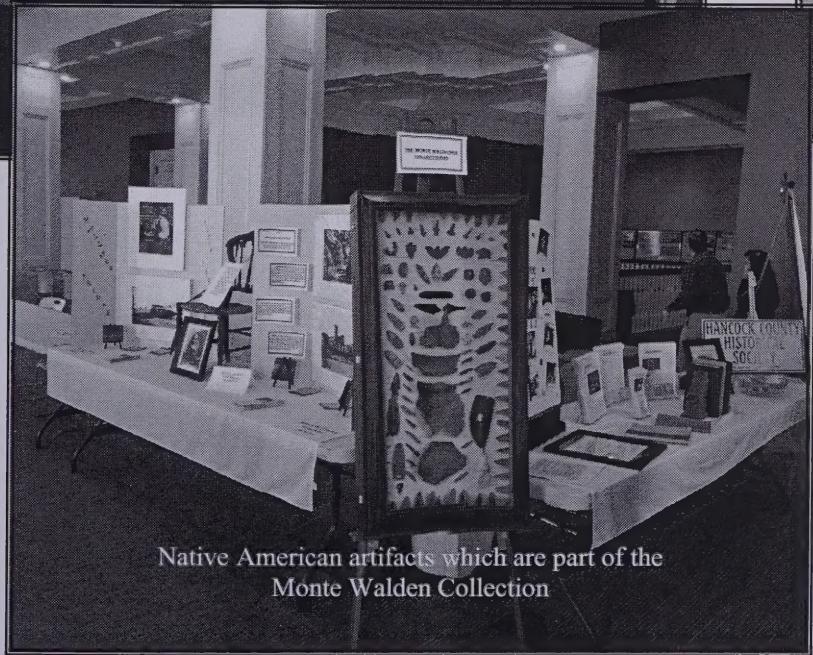
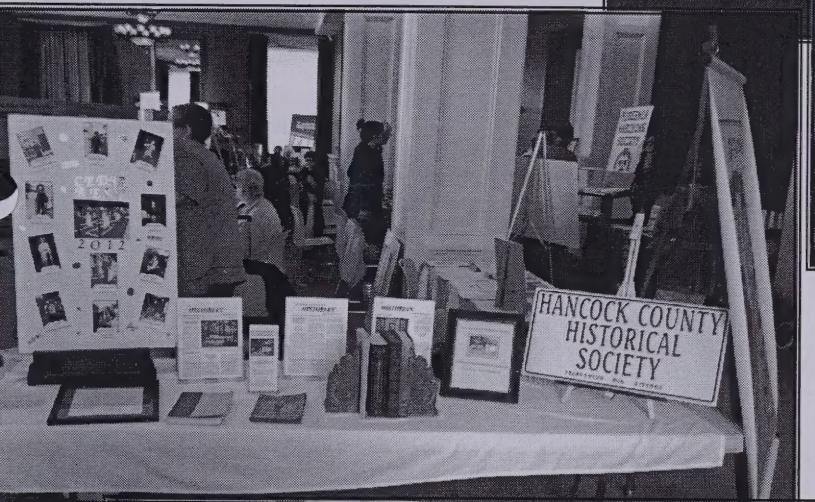
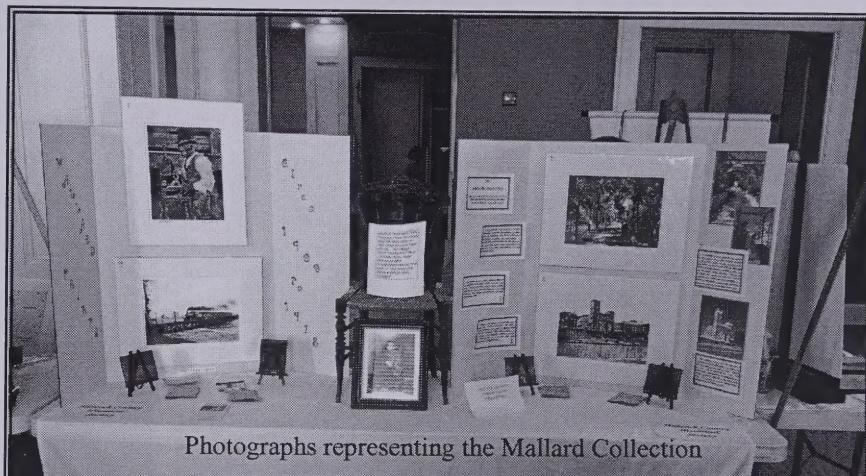


This child's chair was made by Prudent Mallard, and the photograph shows Buster Mallard seated in the chair.

Orleans furniture maker.

The HCHS would like to thank the society members and officers who manned the exhibit during the event: Pat and Louis Fuchs, Madeleine and John Fulwiler, Betty Krieger, Tina Richardson, and Eddie Coleman. A special thank you goes to Pat and Louis for disassembling the display and returning the items to the Kate Lobrano House.

SNAPSHOTS FROM HISTORY WEEK



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Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

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An annotated cookbook of Gulf Coast recipes

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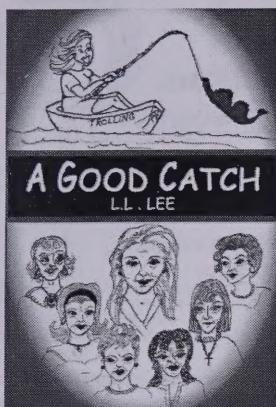
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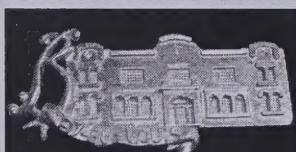
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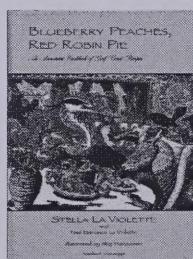
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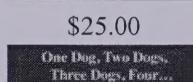
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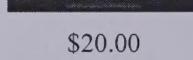
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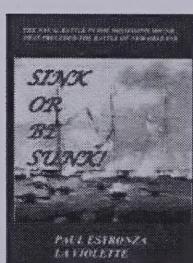
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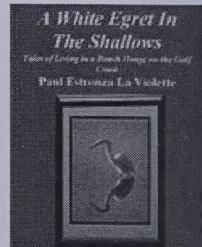
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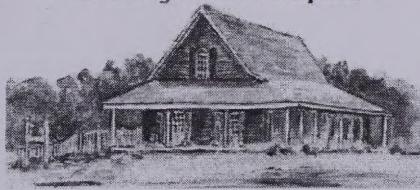


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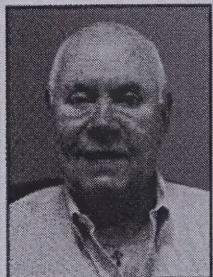
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